Educational Writings

I. WHAT IS "CREDIT-FOR-QUALITY"? A SUMMARY AND EVALUATION OF PUBLISHED DISCUSSIONS

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Many colleges and high schools are now giving "credit-for-quality" in marking student work. This article aims briefly to define and evaluate the device for public-school administrators—to point out its basic features, summarize the arguments for and against it, and present results obtained in using it.[1] The discussion is based upon the reading of the articles (twelve in number) which have been found in scanning the back files of ten educational journals, and the important monographic series and books which relate in any way to the field.[2]

What is credit-for-quality?—It is primarily a device for marking student work and for controlling the number and kind of courses which students take; hence of controlling the time in which they may "graduate." Any school which permits its brighter students to carry, at one time, more than the normal "four courses" is operating one of the features of credit-for-quality. Any school which not only requires its students to pass a given number of courses in order to graduate, but also requires that a given proportion of the courses be passed at a higher grade, say A or B, exhibits in its administrative machinery another of the phases of credit-for-quality. Schools that do these things and use only the conventional letter or numerical marking system (A, B, C, D, etc., or Ex, S, M, I, P, or 100, 90, 80, 70, etc.) have not, however, been regarded as really giving credit-for-quality, because they do not also give "grade-" or "credit-points." In the credit

[1] The general problem of the standardization of methods of marking was treated in a similar summary article in the issue of this journal for May, 1918, under the title "Teachers' Marks and the Reconstruction of the Marking System."

[2] The writer will appreciate having his attention called to any publications on the problem which are not included in the bibliography at the end of the article

schemes suggested during the past ten years, the feature that is new is the mechanical one of assigning to each letter-grade A, B, C, etc., a stated number of "points." Thus, in order to be graduated, the student must not only pass so many courses; he must also secure so many grade- or credit-points. That is, he must not only get a given number of D's, let us say, but he must also get a given number of B's, or C's, or whatever is the new "dead-line" that is put upon the marking scale. Most schools still have *one* dead-line, the "pass mark"; some, for a generation, have had *two* or *three*—such as "exemption" marks, marks which must be maintained in order to take more courses, or in order to take part in the special activities of the school—athletics, journalism, debating, etc.

Credit-for-quality aims to recognize differences in ability.—At bottom, therefore, credit-for-quality is a device of the school administrator to fit the work of the school to the striking variation in ability in students. It is clear that this can be done in two ways: first, by differentiating subject-matter for groups of students of varying ability; second, by letting the better students take more courses or subjects at a time.

1. *The first method.*—This groups students in sections of roughly the same ability and gives each group a course of study adapted to its level. More intensive study of a given field or subject, therefore, is one solution of the very important administrative difficulty which we face in teaching, in masses, children who vary widely in ability. It is encouraging to note that many schools are now experimenting carefully along this line. It is to be hoped that principals of such schools will keep records of results and of their administrative procedure, and that they will describe their experiments in educational journals. It gives promise of being the most helpful single administrative step which we can take to solve the problem of mass-instruction—certainly far more easily administered in a public school than any form of individual instruction; e.g., supervised study.

2. *The credit-for-quality method.*—A still more *easily administered* method of fitting school work to varying ability, however, is to accept our present program of studies (so many courses of mathematics, so many hours of English, of history, of language, of science, etc.) as thoroughly right; correspondingly, to accept the content of each separate course, and to let students carry more courses at a time. This is what credit-for-quality protagonists do. This assumes the correctness of the distribution of the present subjects in the program of studies, both as to number and kinds of subjects and as to content of a specific subject itself. More subjects at a time, more

fields of study carried at once—thus the "15" laps are finished in less than the ordained four years.

This is the crux of credit-for-quality. This is its first outstanding characteristic, namely, *a two-phase marking system.* One phase includes a letter scheme which sets a passing mark and prescribes the number of courses that must be passed for graduation; a second includes generally a "point" scheme, each "grade" or mark carrying automatically a definite number of points, grades above the "average" receiving "extra" credit, those below the average bringing about a deduction or loss of credit. Thus, the *poorer* student is actually forced to take *more* "subjects" or a longer time to graduate by repeating the "subject" until he has made the desired "pass." One characteristic of this two-phase marking system is that it is aimed at focusing attention of students on the necessity for "industry" in order to make a higher mark than "pass" in a given proportion of courses. (Certainly the scheme cannot be thought of as affecting "ability" in any way except as it is contributed to by industry and effort!) Similarly, it is aimed at making the marking system more flexible in the hands of the teacher. Of course, to set *another* dead-line, say at B, corresponding to the one in general use at D, brings about, with many teachers, merely a readjustment of attitude toward the units of the marking scale. However, it can be seen that the designers of the credit-for-quality scheme have in mind that the new machinery will tend to "raise scholarship." This is a commonly stated aim, revealed in the articles on the subject. As suggested above, "raising scholarship" means, in this case, setting a second hurdle (B) after the first one (D), which can be jumped (if "ability" permits) only by greater application. Thus one of the most effective outcomes of credit-for-quality is found in the *pressure* that it exerts on the student for greater industry and concentrated effort.

Illustrative credit-point schemes.—The literature reveals five illustrative credit-point schemes, to which we may refer briefly to provide concrete examples of what is being done. The scheme of grade-points used in the University of North Dakota plan, Kennedy (2), and in that suggested by Secor (3), is as follows:

A.....1.3
B.....1.2
C.....1.0
D.....1.0

These men point out that originally fair work (C or F) carried a credit of 1.1. As a result of the first year's trial in the University of North Dakota, it was found that too many students were receiving extra credit who did not

deserve it. For example, they were getting credit-for-quality for several courses reported good or fair, regardless of the kinds of work which they were doing in their other courses. The student uniformly marked C was also receiving credit-for-quality. Kennedy says: "Experience thus shows that F deserves no extra credit-for-quality. It was also recognized that the student must not be allowed to take more than four studies, unless he made very high records in all studies in previous years." It was pointed out that the student could neglect work in, say, two courses, getting pass, F, or X in the other three, thus accumulating a large score for the term. The methods by which the North Dakota plan was improved, and the restrictions imposed on the number of courses which students were permitted to take, are illustrative of the way in which the scheme has been improved in recent years in other schools.

The credit-point scheme used in the University High School (Chicago) is as follows:

		Units
A	(95)	1.25
A—	(90)	1.20
B	(85)	1.15
B—	(80)	1.10
C	(75)	1.00
C—	(70)	0.95
D	(65)	0.90
D—	(60)	0.85

The fourth plan is that represented by the Richmond, Indiana, High School, in which the credits are as given below:

A	(superior)	1.2 per credit hour
B	(very good)	1.1
C	(average)	1.0
D	(poor)	0.8
F	(failure)	0.0

These four-point schemes are thoroughly representative of the present methods of assigning grade-points. As can be seen, they are based upon the criterion that if there are, say, five grades of work, the third, or middle grade of work, shall be regarded as average or normal, and shall receive one unit of credit; that the next higher grade of work shall receive either 0.1 more credit or 0.2 more credit, and that the very highest grade of work shall receive 0.2 or 0.3 more. Those plans that have been more carefully perfected also imply a penalty by deducting credit for work which drops below

the average. This is illustrated by the Richmond and the University High School plans.

In the tabulated schemes, therefore, a given number of grade-points or credits are assigned for having made a certain mark. Note that the selection of the number of points is entirely arbitrary. It does not recognize the extent of individual differences, of which, in spite of our partial ignorance of the distribution of human traits, we are already fairly certain. For example, we do know that "A" students, who form perhaps the upper 5 to 7 per cent of our entire student group, learn several times more rapidly, acquire skill several times more thoroughly, and develop thought-power which is utterly out of proportion to the additional 0.3 of credit which they get. Thus it should be pointed out that if we finally decide to give credit for the quality of work done, we at least ought to give it in approximate accordance with the distribution of abilities which has been found to exist in the general population. If one should consistently apply a distribution-curve in assigning extra credit for quality—that is, if, instead of using A, B, C, D, one should use numbers which would represent approximately the differences between the pupils in various groups of the marking scale—instead of assigning such values as occur in the scheme, 1.3, 1.2, 1.1, etc., he probably should assign values which vary something like 4.3, 3.4, 2.5, 1.6, 0.7, for those groups of students who are thought of respectively as excellent, superior, medium, inferior, and poor. However, this suggestion is made only to meet the desire of some of the credit-for-quality advocates to differentiate, by a new kind of marking system, the individual abilities of pupils in our classes.

Limitations concerning the number of courses that can be taken.—The first characteristic of the scheme has been shown to be the twofold feature of its marking system. We said credit-for-quality devices controlled the time of graduation by permitting brighter students to take more courses at a time. This points to *the second characteristic of the scheme*: the administration of election of courses must be controlled by faculty action. For a generation colleges and schools have permitted bright students to take courses in addition to required ones, and in excess of the normal number, "on faculty action." Even in many schools which operate a credit-for-quality scheme "faculty action" is necessary to permit a student to take certain additional courses. For example, in the University of Chicago High School students must maintain an average of "80" and get permission "by faculty action" to take five units. At the same time the credit or point scheme operates, *in part* automatically, to permit (without faculty action) any student who gets 75 to take an additional half-course in certain special fields, such as

mechanical drawing. The grade-point scheme given above illustrates the way in which credit is deducted if the student falls below 75.

Essential purposes of credit-for-quality.—The purposes of the scheme are clarified by the enumeration of its two outstanding characteristics. We have already discussed the fundamental one—that of fitting school work to the varying abilities of students. The second purpose, as gleaned from published accounts by protagonists of the movement, is that of giving credit toward graduation for higher quality of work. Advocates, like Secor (3) and Kennedy (2), assert that the conventional marking system differentiates but two grades of ability, failure and pass. They say we do not distinguish the "excellent" from the "average" or from "fair." Hence the inference by some of these workers, that the proper way to differentiate between levels of ability is to introduce another system of marks, the only difference between it and the conventional one being that the one is expressed in one set of units, A, B, C, D, for example, and the other is expressed in a numerical set of units such as 1.0, 1.2, etc.

The third purpose, and one reiterated constantly by advocates of the device, is that giving credit-for-quality provides an incentive to do good work. The literature abounds in arguments pro and con on this question. Advocates of credit-for-quality, such as Kennedy (2), insist that the results of administering the scheme show that it does operate as a powerful incentive for a higher quality of work. Its opponents, however, even in the same institution, such as Ladd (4) in the University of North Dakota, strenuously object to such conclusions, and go on record as saying that the "adoption of the device in secondary schools would be nothing short of a calamity." He says that it provides an artificial incentive to high scholarship, and not a natural one.

This purpose of setting up helpful incentives to better qualities of work has led to a misapprehension on the part of a number of writers in the field—e.g., Ruediger (7)—that giving credit-for-quality, with the accompanying "standard" grades which are set before the student for graduation, will imply that he can finish his school career with fewer subjects taken. The more recent discussions of this question, such as Johnson's (10), indicate (by the restrictions that are placed upon election of courses, the number of courses which a student can take at any one time, and the fact that he must make a high grade in each one of these courses) that this misapprehension has been largely cleared away.

How did credit-for-quality start?—The scheme is a college innovation. It was suggested first in 1902 by President William D. Hyde, of Bowdoin

College. The literature does not show that President Hyde or his college tried out the scheme suggested by him. Three years later we find two instances (at Columbia and University of North Dakota) in which colleges had put into practice the essential ideas of his scheme, namely, that of superimposing upon an A, B, C, D, or Ex, S, M, F, P, system of marking, an extra-credit scheme. During the first decade of the twentieth century there was a distinct movement under way in our colleges and secondary schools, looking toward the shortening of the college curriculum and the improving of marking and credit systems. It was due in part to the activities of men like Presidents Elliot and Harper. Many of these administrative changes had to do with devising dual credit and point schemes which since then have been introduced into many colleges.

Results obtained under the operation of credit-for-quality schemes—proportion finishing in less than normal time.—In the theoretical schemes which have been reported, one of the arguments advanced for the method is that it will permit the rapid pupils to finish the four-year high-school course or college course in less than the normal four years. Reports which are available show that it is exceptional indeed for the scheme to operate in this fashion. When the proper restrictions are placed upon it, only a very small percentage of the pupils in a school will finish in less than four years. For example, in the University High School varying credit was given prior to 1915 for four years. In that time no pupil had by reason of the credit-for-quality scheme been graduated in three years. Several had secured 20 units in four years. A very few had finished in three and one-half years. The same comment is made by other writers.

In this respect there is a distinct difference between the point of view of Pickell (12) and Secor (3) and that of the designers of the University High School scheme. The former two apparently emphasize the fact that students will finish the high-school course in less than four years. The latter emphasize the fact that students will have covered more subjects of study, or have done them more intensively.

Lack of discussion of varying the courses for different grades of ability.—This whole discussion of credit-for-quality emphasizes the fact that its protagonists are overlooking the basic method of fitting school work to the varying abilities of children, namely, that of grouping children in sections of approximately equal ability and of designing minimal, superior, and rapid courses of study for such sections. At the present time the discussion of credit-for-quality has emphasized the possibility of having the pupil take more courses, and not do more intensive work within a subject of study.

SUMMARY

1. Credit-for-quality is a name given to a method of marking students' work and of determining the number of courses which they can take at a given time.

2. It is a form of school machinery which administrators are using to let the brighter pupils work up to their abilities. It does this by permitting them to take more subjects at a given time.

3. It is designed to act as an incentive to better scholarship. It is asserted that it does this by setting two dead-lines on the marking scale—one, the passing mark, the second, the mark which must be made in a given proportion of the courses in order to be graduated. This is believed to contribute, and probably would contribute, to greater *industry* on the part of the "average" and slightly slower students. It cannot really affect their abilities, except through industry.

4. It is so designed, however, that it ignores the slower student, penalizing him for his lack of ability at the same time that it does *not* differentiate subject-matter in a way adapted to his lesser ability. Thus it succeeds in fulfilling its fundamental purpose—varying work to fit ability—for the brighter students only. Furthermore, it is obvious that it does this only in a very coarse way—grouping together in one "ability class" the A's, B's, etc., who vary widely in ability.

5. The grade- or credit-point element in the device seems to be a non-essential. In order to operate it successfully, "faculty action" appears to be necessary just the same in individual cases. Therefore a school that operates one of the conventional marking systems, and "on faculty action" permits individual pupils to vary the number of courses in accordance with their abilities, is carrying out the chief function of the credit-for-quality scheme.

6. School principals and superintendents should acquaint themselves with the fundamental inadequacies of the method as a device for adapting school work to individual differences. They are urged to take the far more direct method of grouping pupils in sections of approximately equal ability and prescribing courses of study that are fitted to the differences in ability of these groups. To permit a student to take *more* courses is the easier method; this fact explains the number of schools doing it. It only very partially solves the problem, and that, too, for only a small fraction of our school population. The formation of sections of like ability can be easily

and helpfully accomplished by the use of practical tests for "general ability" or "intelligence."[1]

To adapt courses of study to varying groups is difficult. It will be a very profitable exercise, however, for the faculty of any school. It is to be hoped that principals will make greater use of it in the future.

BIBLIOGRAPHY ON CREDIT-FOR-QUALITY

[Articles are arranged in chronological order]

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Relates to credit-for-quality only incidentally. Describes credit and point scheme introduced in colleges since 1905. The first published discussion found upon credit-for-quality.

2. KENNEDY, JOSEPH. "Credit for Quality in the University of North Dakota," *Educational Review*, XXXII (1906), 525–31.

Description of the administration of credit-for-quality in the University of North Dakota during 1905–6. Gives the point scheme installed and reports the attitude of those faculty members who were favorable to the use of the device. Shows how it has been changed under experimentation.

3. SECOR, W. B. "Credit for Quality in Secondary Schools," *Educational Review*, XXXV (1908), 486–90.

Recommends a credit scheme practically like that used at the University of North Dakota; advances arguments for the scheme. Gives concrete illustrations showing the way it works with individual students.

4. LADD, A. J. "Credit for Quality in Secondary and Higher Education," *Educational Review*, XXXVII (1909), 298–305. (Summary of an article by same author in *Western Journal of Education* for May, 1909.)

Primarily a reply to Kennedy (2). Reports the attitude of those in the University of North Dakota opposed to credit-for-quality. Gives no concrete evidence, but enumerates evils which he says opponents of the scheme in the University recognize.

5. JUDD, CHARLES H. "Formalism in Defining High-School Units," *School Review*, XXII (1914), 649–65.

An article which enumerates the difficulties in standardizing quantitatively the high-school unit and which suggests methods

[1] Professor F. N. Freeman and the writer are now standardizing such group tests for Grades VII–XII inclusive. They will be glad to communicate with anyone about them. The Otis Group Intelligence Tests have been thoroughly standardized for the elementary grades. They are distributed by the World Book Company, Yonkers-on-Hudson, N Y.

of correcting these. Touches incidentally on the specific problem of credit-for-quality through the discussion of crediting performances of children who vary widely in ability.

6. HOBLIT, M. L. "The High-School Unit: Quantity, Quality, and Credit," *School Review*, XXIII (1915), 303–6.

Article called forth by Judd (5). Says the solution of the problem is to give extra quantitative credit for unusual grades of work. By concrete illustration recommends a scheme of credit-points by which the better students can finish a four-year course in shorter time. Taking extra courses and completing the work in shorter time appears to be the crux of his argument.

7. RUEDIGER, W. C. "Is Credit for Quality Sound?" *School Review*, XXIII (1915), 450–54.

A reply to Hoblit (6). Gives four arguments against credit-for-quality: (1) quantity and quality are disparate; (2) the marking-system generally used carries credit-for-quality; (3) "this unnatural credit introduces a vicious and artificial incentive"; (4) implies that students will be permitted to graduate with fewer courses. The fourth point is basic to the later discussion. Ruediger's misinterpretation of credit-for-quality is typical of that of a great many school-men.

8. MEYER, MAX F. "Symposium on Credit for Quality by Professors Meyer, Hoblit and Johnson," *School Review*, XXIII (1915), 711.

The first of three discussions in a symposium (8, 9, 10). Replies to Ruediger's four arguments against credit-for-quality. Shows that it does not mean permitting students to graduate without a given number of required subjects. Includes general philosophical discussion of honors, rewards, and penalties in college and school work.

9. HOBLIT, M. L. "Is Credit for Quality Sound? A Rejoinder," *School Review*, XXIII (1915), 712–14.

Replies to Ruediger's fourth point by indicating that there is no suggestion that high-grade work shall excuse students from any fundamental subjects or content. Students shall not be permitted to graduate with fewer than the standard number of courses. Repeats concrete example given in previous article (6).

10. JOHNSON, FRANKLIN W. "Credit for Courses in the University High School," *School Review*, XXIII (1915), 715–18.

Describes credit-for-quality as administered in the University High School, University of Chicago. Summarizes briefly the favorable results of using it during four years.

11. RUEDIGER, W. C. "Credit for Quality," *School and Society*, III (1916), 207–8.

A reiteration of what was said in previous article (7).

12. PICKELL, FRANK G. "Credit for Quality in the Richmond (Ind.) High School," *Education, Administration and Supervision*, III (1917), 533–8.

Describes the credit-for-quality scheme in use in the Richmond (Indiana) High School. Reports without objective evidence that the scheme leads to the improvement of scholarship in the school. Discusses certain general phases of school marks.

II. COMMENTS ON CURRENT EDUCATIONAL PUBLICATIONS

A type of civics which has been for the most part overlooked is presented in very readable form[1] by two writers, Mr. and Mrs. Giles, who have had much experience as teachers of young people. The book contains descriptions of the industrial and professional opportunities which this country offers; it gives in each case an account of the qualifications and preparation required for success in the vocation under consideration, and presents a balanced account of the advantages and disadvantages of that particular calling.

In addition to this useful information for the guidance of personal choice the book carries also a very large freightage of information about industrial and social institutions. For example, there is a chapter on the opportunities for employment offered by the government. In this chapter the authors have managed to give a vivid picture of life in the government offices and some insight also into what these offices are accomplishing.

There is a chapter at the end of the book on personality which without preaching gives to the reader a clear idea of the commercial value of good presence and good character.

The examples throughout are concrete and direct. The vocabulary used is such as to fall within the range of upper-grade pupils. The book ought to find an immediate welcome in the junior high school and elsewhere where pupils are beginning to think of their future occupations.

The book furnishes a very striking example of the new type of material which is sure to be taken up in increasing measure by schools. Civics will be divided into many sections. Each section will represent a different mode

[1] FREDERIC MAYO GILES and IMOGENE KEAN GILES, *Vocational Civics, A Study of Occupations as a Background for the Consideration of a Life-Career*. New York: Macmillan, 1919. Pp. x+252. $1.30.

of approach, but all will converge on social institutions, and the course of study will be enriched by a content which has never appeared in the books on geography or history or in the ordinary literary readers.

The book is the outgrowth of a course given by the authors to high-school pupils. Many teachers ought to be encouraged by it to formulate the results of their class work so that there shall be a more general participation in the advantages which come from the introduction of social studies into school curricula. Many teachers are here and there doing work in civics which is successful. What is needed is an exchange of materials.

C. H. JUDD

A supplementary book of outdoor science for teachers and pupils of nature-study.—As indicated by the title, this book[1] is divided into three parts. An approximately equal number of pages is given to each of the three phases of nature-study which are of perennial interest to pupils.

Part I, divided into twenty-three chapters, contains sixteen chapters which consider different varieties of trees, such as the maple, elm, oak, ash, evergreen, tulip, sequoia, birch, cedar, and pine. Interspersed with these chapters are seven chapters bearing on structure of trees, woods and their properties, figures in woods, transplanting trees, care of trees, and other similar subjects of general interest.

Part II, in seventeen chapters, is devoted to the heavenly bodies, including, among others, the following chapters selected at random: the universe and the solar system, determining distances to the heavenly bodies, the starry heavens, the sun, the moon, the planets, shooting stars and comets.

In Part III twenty-nine chapters treat of birds. One finds, among these, chapters on the thrush family, classification of birds, feeding birds in winter, warblers, migration of birds, swallows, sparrows, birds of prey, water birds, flycatchers, and making grounds attractive for birds. Following a short appendix to Part III are found over fifty colored engravings of birds reproduced from the original paintings of Louis Agassiz Fuertes.

The book was written to overcome the lack of a suitable textbook in outdoor science of an elementary nature. It is designed for use in the upper grades of the elementary school and for classes in the junior high school to encourage pupils to observe and study the world about them. It is suggested by the author that Part I be studied in the fall, Part II in the winter, and Part III in the spring, but he advises against the mistakes of restricting the

[1] EDWARD LINCOLN MOSELEY, *Trees, Stars and Birds*, Yonkers-on-Hudson, N.Y.: World Book Co., 1918. Pp. 246.

study of any part to a single season and of attempting to finish any part before taking up the other parts.

The average length of the chapters is between five and six pages. This gives the book the appearance of a ready-reference book. However, it contains some valuable directions to pupils and should find a place in the elementary-school library. For pupils in general science it may be used as a supplementary reference. The valuable bibliographies at the end of each part should not be overlooked.

C. J. PIEPER

III. PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED DURING THE PAST MONTH

A. GENERAL EDUCATIONAL METHOD, HISTORY, THEORY, AND PRACTICE

LAMBERTON, C. D. *Professional Arithmetic Note Book: Teaching the Special Topics.* Paper. Published by the *School Quarterly*, Berlin, Wis., 1917. Pp. 20. $0.15.

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B. BOOKS PRIMARILY FOR ELEMENTARY-GRADE TEACHERS AND PUPILS

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ANDERSON, H. S. *Food and Cookery.* Mountain View, Cal.: Pacific Press Pub. Assoc., 1917. Pp. 163.

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TRANSEAU, EDGAR N. *Science of Plant Life.* Yonkers-on-Hudson, N.Y.: World Book Co., 1919. Pp. ix+336. $1.48.

D. PUBLICATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES BUREAU OF EDUCATION AND SIMILAR MATERIAL IN PAMPHLET FORM

Annual Report of the General Education Board 1917–1918. New York: General Education Board. Paper. Pp. x+116.

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E. MISCELLANEOUS BOOKS

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